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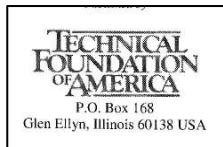
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Best Practices in Technology Education: Student Competitive Events
Recognized by the Technical Foundation of America

Description of Best Practice:



A competitive event at the public school or collegiate levels of technology education is an important component of students' education in technology education. Competitive events allow students to apply what they have learned in the classroom to an action-based situation. In addition, competitive events allow and encourage students to network with other students from around the state/country.

Perhaps you've heard, "don't let your classes get in the way of your education." While the quote may not be attributed to any one individual, many educators have used it over the years. It implies that valuable, meaningful experiences (even knowledge) can be gained outside the traditional classroom

This theory leads directly into collegiate students participating in extracurricular activities such as conferences and competitive events. College students benefit greatly from professional activities beyond the routine technology education classroom and laboratory. An effective technology teacher educator realizes the importance of having students participate in educational events and ventures.

Extracurricular activities place significant responsibilities on students as they strive to excel in a contest or professional activity. Energetic teamwork is required so participation often brings a high level of personal commitment. Classroom content that was avoided or didn't seem important at the time often gains relevance. Working under pressure often brings out the best in students (e.g. effort, focus, creativity, and motivation).

Learning is a lifelong venture and anything that can make it fun and more rewarding is tremendous. A Technology Education Collegiate Association (TECA) advisor or sponsor can enhance the lifelong learning of students. Collegiate students who participate in competitive events are going to learn a great deal from an exciting, motivational activity ... which creates a win-win situation for the student, teacher, and program.



Three examples of student participation in competitive events are the following.

1. One school on the eastern seaboard used to dominate the communication contest at the annual TECA East Coast Regional Conference. The student team from the university used some moderately advanced editing equipment to produce outstanding video productions. Their transitions, titles, and other features were far more sophisticated than the single camera work of other student teams. After a few years of being dominated in the contests, students at other schools decided it was time to become more competitive. The students encouraged their professors to purchase portable editing equipment so that their team's entries would be comparable. Many universities ended up with new equipment at the urging of faculty advisors and participating students. Over the past decade numerous technology teacher education majors have been exposed to innovative video technologies due to a few TECA students at another institution.
2. TECA leadership teamed with the Society of Manufacturing Engineers to sponsor the TECA manufacturing contest. While relatively few schools entered the regional competitions each year, it is important to note that each team that did enter the competition had 4-6 students on their squad. If only 10-12 teams entered the contest annually, that's still approximately 50 students who are posed to become better manufacturing educators. Upon graduation, those same 50-plus technology educators shape the lives of dozens of secondary students. Bottom line? TECA manufacturing contests help to prepare students to become better future production teachers.
3. When preparing to leave for a TECA regional conference a few years, one group of students remembered that some video equipment had been purchased a year or so earlier. The faculty member who had placed the order had long left for another university. That meant the camera, editing console, and related equipment were all sitting on a shelf in a back room. The equipment might have stayed there except that a group of TECA students thought it could be used to win an event at that coming weekend's competition. As one might expect, the video materials never made it back to the same shelf. Suddenly every student and several faculty members wanted to borrow the items each week or weekend.

When the discussion turns to best practices, perhaps the adage of "...don't let your classes get in the way" is somewhat on target. Technology educators need to realize that today's youth are motivated in many different ways. One successful means of promoting learning and professionalism is through fun, yet rewarding activities that occur outside the normal sequence of required courses.



Some people suggest that it takes a special person to foster a TECA style experience. One must know when to “get out of the way” and let students “grow” on their own. Simply direct or lead the students to a point where they are comfortable and then let them discover a world of professionalism on their own. An individual who has served as a role model in TECA activities is Richard Seymour at Ball State University.

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